



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Spencer have little or no interest. They welcome it rather on account of its fancied solutions of problems quite foreign to science.

One other remarkable feature of our author's method deserves notice, a feature not unprecedented in efforts of the same sort, namely, the putting of a scientific question to a vote of "facts," on the principle, apparently, of free and impartial suffrage and numerical majorities. The "facts" which various theories "account for" are duly marshalled, paragraphed, and numbered by the author. Forty-seven facts prove the resemblance of the earth to the planets; twenty-three, that the fixed stars are suns; twenty-eight, the author's theory that the earth was once self-luminous like the sun. "Eight facts or classes of facts" prove his theory that the chemical elements were "formed during the period of nebular condensation." The chemical theory "accounts for" seventy-one facts, and gravity "accounts for" fifty-three free and independent facts in the solar system.

It must be confessed that the magnitude of these numbers is in many cases due to a want of entire independence among the "facts," and oftener to the circumstance that many of them are only interpretations of fact in accordance with theory. Some of the facts, moreover, need qualification, others confirmation, and nearly all lack that power of demonstration which the author attributes to them. Their strength lies in their numbers, but the genuine truths of science do not depend on such crude numerical inductions. One fact as well ascertained as the law of gravity might be sufficient to rout the whole seventy which the author's chemical theory "accounts for," without injury to the substantial merits of a single one; though it would hardly be able to do so if it depended on evidence no more cogent than the fifty-three which gravity accounts for, according to the author. In reality, gravity accounts with mathematical precision for as many thousands of facts, — facts of particular and direct observation. And this is the only kind of evidence which ought to be considered as a basis of physical demonstration.

5. — *The Book of the Sonnet.* Edited by LEIGH HUNT and S. ADAMS LEE. Boston: Roberts Brothers. 1867. 2 vols. pp. xiv., 340; vi., 343.

THE Essay by Leigh Hunt, which fills the first ninety pages of this book, "On the Cultivation, History, and Varieties of the Species of Poem called the Sonnet," is a very charming little piece of literary work. It has the grace and refinement, the delicate literary tact, and the pleasant culture, which are characteristic of his best writing. The

subject was suited to his special genius, and lay within the range of his special information. "Fed of the dainties that are bred in a book," his finely cultivated taste fitted him to discourse appreciatingly of the daintiest of literary compositions; and the very artificiality which distinguishes the sonnet as compared with other and freer forms of poetry gave it a peculiar attraction to a poet the natural tendency of whose genius was rather to prettiness than to force. He was a genuine connoisseur of minor poetry, and he had a sympathetic enjoyment of it, half spiritual and half sensuous, which often gives a rare felicity to his critical judgments. He was a poetic *gourmet*, and relished keenly the old Madeira flavor in a sonnet, or the bouquet of the Green Seal Johannisberg in a song.

The Essay contains all that the general reader need know about the sonnet in Italian and English, but it gives us no account of the sonnet in France or Spain or Germany. Italy is, indeed, the native land of the sonnet, and outside of Italy it has flourished most and best in England. But it would have been worth while to tell something of the fate of the sonnet in other lands. In France at one time it was greatly cultivated, and occupied a large space in the field of literature. D'Olivet, in his entertaining History of the French Academy, tells us of the dispute which divided the court in regard to the comparative merits of a sonnet by Benserade on Job, and that to Urania by Voiture. "Two parties were formed which disputed greatly and decided nothing. One, under the name of the *Jobelins*, followed the standard of the Prince de Conti; and the other, under the name of the *Uranins*, had Madame de Longueville at its head." And M. Cousin, in his book on the "Youth of Madame de Longueville," enters into a full account of this great quarrel. Who can forget the charming scene in *Les Femmes Savantes*, in which Trissotin reads one of the absurd sonnets then in vogue to the ecstatic admiration of his bourgeois audience?

"Et je pense qu'ici je ne ferai pas mal
De joindre à l'épigramme, ou bien au madrigal,
La ragout d'un sonnet qui, chez une princesse,
A passé pour avoir quelque délicatesse."

Colletet, one of the original Academicians, a very poor poet, but a very fluent sonneteer, published in 1658 a treatise on the Sonnet, which is still the best existing book in French upon the subject, and is full of matter which would have pleasantly enriched Leigh Hunt's Essay. And surely the Essay ought to have contained the clever verses in which Boileau describes the nature and form of the sonnet:—

"On dit, à ce propos, qu'un jour ce dieu bizarre, [Apollon]
Voulant pousser à bout tous les rimeurs français,

Inventa du sonnet les rigoureuses lois ;
 Voulut qu'en deux quatrains de mesure pareille
 La rime avec deux sons frappât huit fois l'oreille ;
 Et qu'ensuite six vers artistement rangés
 Fussent en deux tercets par le sens partagés.
 Surtout de ce poème il bannit la licence :
 Lui-même en mesura le nombre et la cadence ;
 Défendit qu'un vers foible y pût jamais entrer,
 Ni qu'un mot déjà mis osât s'y remonter.
 Du reste il l'enrichit d'une beauté suprême :
 Un sonnet sans défaut vaut seul un long poème.
 Mais en vain mille auteurs y pense arriver ;
 Et cet heureux phénix est encore à trouver."

But we have not space to go on with further illustrations of this sort to supply the omissions of the Essay. We must come back to the main topic.

The sonnet is a comparatively recent invention. "It belongs to modern literature alone,* and it is one of the very few forms of poetic composition invented in modern times which possesses the elements of permanence. Its extreme artificiality is at once a test and a temptation,—a test, since it is only a true poet who can make artificiality serve the purposes of art; and a temptation, since the artificial construction,—the mere form—can be easily built up and filled out with words by the simplest handicraftsman in verse. This distinction, which involves all the difference between poetic creation and mechanic production, is not marked with precision in Leigh Hunt's Essay. He was too fond of pretinences and artifices and pleasant triflings to estimate them at their absolute value; and he was too much under the influence of the old traditional superstition which gives to mere cleverly compacted verse the title of poetry, as well as too broad and genial a liker, to refuse credit and authority to what professed to be poetry, though in reality but a base imitation of divine art. But he would hardly have retained the leniency of his temper had he been forced to read through the sonnets by American authors which his American coadjutor has brought together in the second volume. With the exception of a very few,—not a score,—it would be hard to find a series of more faded, lifeless, and imitative verses than these specimen American sonnets. The unreal character of these works of hard labor for writer and reader alike reminds us of the unreality of the sonneteering in Italy during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The sonnet becomes a mere *jeu d'es-*

* In the Essay (page 8) it is said that the sonnet "made its first known appearance at the beginning of the twelfth century, and in Italy." Twelfth stands here for thirteenth. The earliest known sonnet is supposed to be one by Pietro della Vigna, whom all readers of the *Inferno* remember, who died in 1249.

prêt, and the artificiality of its form is equalled, if not outdone, by the artificiality of the thoughts and feelings expressed in it. There is, indeed, a great lack of that facility of expression among our later sonneteers, which gives to the Italians, even of the lowest decline, a certain appearance of naturalness, if not of nature. The Italian sonnet flows. From beginning to end of *Le Tre Giuli*, Casti seems to write with entire fluency and ease. But such a *tour de force* as his two hundred sonnets is quite beyond the strength of our rhymesters.

Leigh Hunt expresses the hope that his work "may help to excite a disposition to the cultivation of the sonnet." The very phrase implies the artificiality which is at once the weakness and the strength of the sonnet. The frame of sonnets may be made and polished and filed out, but a sonnet that is to be really a poem is not to be "cultivated," as if it were a tulip or a carnation. It was when the sonnet was "cultivated" in Italy that it ran into the fantastic exuberance and puerile extravagances which were the delight of the rhymers of the fourteenth century, and of their successors, the Corydons and Phyllises of the Tuscan Arcadia. Leigh Hunt gives some account of the various triflings of the poetasters with iterating, retrograde, linked, tailed, and other sonnets; but Muratori, in his *Perfetta Poesia*, gives a fuller list of the varieties of the sonnet, taken from a Latin treatise on Italian Poetry by a Paduan judge, Antonio da Tempo, who wrote in the fourteenth century.* The old writer says: "Sonetorum 16 sunt species; scilicet: simplex, duplex, dimidiatus, caudatus, continuus, incatenatus, duodenarius, repetitus, retrogradus, semiliteratus, metricus, bilinguis, mutus, septenarius, communis, retornellatus,"—and of each of these various forms he gives a specimen.

It is a pity that the fourth book of Dante's treatise *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, in which he promised to give an account of the sonnet, has not come down to us, or was never written; for the rules of the first great master of the sonnet might have saved his degenerate successors from some of the errors into which they fell, and might at least have preserved some of them from the enervating influence of Petrarch's delightful but dangerous example. Dante's own sonnets have never been surpassed in truth of imagination, in grace, in harmony of thought with form; and Leigh Hunt remarks justly, that his superiority over Pe-

* Leigh Hunt in his Essay refers to this book of Muratori, and speaks of the author as "worth hearing on most points relating to poetry." But Muratori's critical judgment was by no means profound or refined. His taste, corrupted by that of his age, is often at fault; and his book is an immense mass of good and bad disquisition and comment, which few people—unless they be as idle lovers of poetry as Leigh Hunt himself—will ever read through. We have Hunt's own copy of the book before us, full of his manuscript notes.

trarch in the sonnet appears not only in respect to imagination, but in respect "of grace over elegance, that is to say, of the inner spirit of the beautiful over the outer; of unstudied as opposed to studied effect; of sentiment expressing itself wholly for its own sake, contrasted with sentiment selecting its words for the sake of the words also."

It is curious, as Leigh Hunt observes, that Chaucer, versed as he was in Italian literature, wrote no sonnets; but his three greatest successors among the English poets are happily our three chief sonneteers, and to each of them, but with especial fitness to Shakespeare, may be applied the words just used in regard to Dante. The apparently unstudied effects of Shakespeare's sonnets, the singularly simple and forcible expression of sentiment which they exhibit, as well as the abundance and truth of their imaginative spirit, give to them, notwithstanding their failure to comply with the strictest rules of form of the sonnet, a place as exceptional among sonnets as that which is held in the drama by his plays. Studied effects of diction are more obvious in Milton's sonnets, but they are natural to the quality of his thought and feeling, and rather enhance than diminish the power and truth of these little poems. Wordsworth's sonnets are far more unequal. The best of them are among his best poems, fine alike in conception and in expression, so that the very limits and artifice of form seem to be the choice of highest art, and means for the purest effect. But there are some among his sonnets in which the mechanical apparatus becomes visible, and mere rhetoric is substituted for poetry.

"Non hæc Calliope, non hæc tibi cantat Apollo."

The most unequal of great poets, Wordsworth lacked the sense of inspiration. He did not distinguish between the presence and the absence of the Muse, or between inspiration and the excitement of work. Let his example be a warning to those who set themselves to work to be poetical and to write sonnets. A man who has to work to be a poet will never be one, for poetry is the play and pleasure of all the faculties of the soul.

Our American writers of verse have worked hard at the sonnet, and their productions show the result. Let the would-be sonneteer lay to heart the fact, that, though there are rules for writing the sonnet, no *poem* was ever written by rule.

The volumes of this *Book of the Sonnet* are very prettily printed, and deserve a place in the choicest collection.